

Week #	254	Series:	The Gospels
Title:	Jesus is Baptized		
Scriptures:	Matthew 3:9; Joshua 4:8-9; Joshua 4:21-22; Luke 3:3; Matthew 3:13; Matthew 3:14; Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 35:5-6; Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 3:21-22; Matthew 4:1; Matthew 11:2-6; Matthew 11:11; Matthew 11:5		

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**Jesus is Baptized:**

John was baptizing all kinds of people – Roman soldiers, Jews, Samaritans, even those from the Sadducees and Pharisees came to him to be baptized, though he called them out for their double standard of living and said they were not doing so with the right intention of their heart. He actually referred to them as “snakes” – referencing their connection to the serpent of Genesis that drew Adam and Eve into sin. It was a very harsh criticism. (Matthew 3:7-12)

This biting criticism actually gives us a tiny hint as to where exactly John was baptizing people.

Matthew 3:9

<sup>9</sup> And don’t suppose you can comfort yourselves by saying, ‘Avraham [Abraham] is our father’! For I tell you that God can **raise up for Avraham [Abraham] sons from these stones!**

This references the stones of Joshua’s era.

Joshua 4:8-9

<sup>8</sup> The people of Isra’el did just as Y’hoshua [Joshua] had ordered. They took twelve stones out of the Yarden riverbed, as *Adonai* had said to Y’hoshua [Joshua] , corresponding to the number of the tribes of the people of Isra’el, carried them over with them to the place where they were camping, and set them down there.

<sup>9</sup> Y’hoshua [Joshua] also **set up twelve stones in the Yarden [Jordan] River itself**, in the place where the feet of the *Cohanim [priests]* carrying the ark for the covenant had stood. They are there to this day.

The stones are called "standing stones." Standing stones are an ancient way of memorializing what God did in a certain location. When you see the stone, you can then inquire about what it was that God did.

Joshua 4:21-22

<sup>21</sup> Then he said to the people of Isra’el, “In the future, when your children ask their fathers what these stones mean, <sup>22</sup> you are to explain it to them by saying, ‘Isra’el came over this Yarden [Jordan] on dry land.

Like most rivers the Jordan at times would fill the riverbanks and times where it would flow well below the riverbanks. During those low times the Israelites would be able to see the stones set up in the riverbed. They would always be able to see the stones that were set up on the land near the Jordan at Tel Gilgal.

When we look back at the crossing of the Jordan River by Joshua and the Israelites, we find some interesting factors to think about that tie into this event with Jesus being baptized.

Joshua instructed the priests to go out into the water with the Ark of the Covenant. They went to the middle of the water, and God split the water, drying up the river so they could cross. Joshua then instructed one man from each of the twelve tribes to get the stones from the river bank and take them to Gilgal (where they had set up camp) and set them there. Then he replaced the twelve stones with others, setting them up where the priests held the Ark. It was then, after the memorials had been made, that the soldiers crossed the Jordan on dry land, God having held back the waters.

When we studied this before, we learned that God held back the waters from this part of the Jordan (at Gilgal) all the way to another point.

Joshua 3:15-16

<sup>15</sup> When those carrying the ark had come to the Yarden [Jordan], and the *Cohanim [priests]* carrying the ark had waded into the water (for throughout harvest season the Yarden [Jordan] overflows its banks), <sup>16</sup> the water upstream stood piled up like an embankment for a great distance at Adam, the city next to Tzartan [Zarethan]; so that the water flowing downstream toward the Sea of the 'Aravah, the Dead Sea, was completely cut off; and the people crossed over right by Yericho [Jericho].

I find it funny that God held back the waters from Gilgal all the way back to Adam – the city – and they were able to cross. When Jesus stepped into those waters, He was the perfect sinless person who would bring redemption to the world from all the way back to Adam – the person.

In the Bible crossing-over always involves passing through water. The notion of being born again brings us the image of passing through the water of the womb to get to the other side in a physical birth. This God-pattern of utilizing water is a symbol of crossing-over in the ritual of baptism.

God loves to use geographical places to make a statement. He does so here in this as well. At the Jordan, throughout scripture, three prophetic handoffs occur:

1. Joshua took over after the death of Mose leading the people into the promised land.
2. Elisha took over after the charioting away of Elijah.
3. Jesus took over from John carrying on the message of repentance and salvation.

Luke 3:21-22

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<sup>21</sup> When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.

<sup>22</sup> And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

**Notes:**

The first note I’d like to point out is the mention that the heavens were opened. They believed in the firmament. Firmament is a name for the sky or the heavens – meaning that it was an extended solid surface or flat expanse, considered to be a hemisphere above the Earth.

Genesis 1:6-8 (NKJV)

<sup>6</sup> Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." <sup>7</sup> Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament; and it was so. <sup>8</sup> And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

They looked at the heavens as being a solid object. So when Holy Spirit descended out of the heavens and a voice was heard booming from the sky, this was a huge deal for them. It was as if the heavens themselves were ripped open by God Himself. Then Holy Spirit came down and descended upon Jesus as a dove would. Why a dove? Perhaps it ties back to another story of redemption – that of Noah when God saved them on the ark. The dove was what Noah used to tell him if the land had begun to dry up. God likes to use symbolism like this throughout scripture. Jesus is bringing salvation just as God, through Noah and the ark, brought salvation to people.

As we talked about in a previous lesson, there are two kinds of rabbis – Torah Teachers, and Rabbis with S’mikhah. A Rabbi with S’mikhah was one who had “authority” as witnessed by two with authority.

This tradition goes back to the time of Moses in the wilderness. Moses was becoming overwhelmed with all the tiny details that leading such a mass of people would entail. His father-in-law Jethro suggested that he appoint leaders under him that could then take care of the smaller things. Moses and Aaron were the two leaders, as it were. They appointed 70 men from the twelve tribes and they put their hands on these men, saying in front of everyone that these men had been given “authority” to do these tasks for Moses and Aaron.

This ceremony passed down through the ages, and it is said that these Rabbis that walked while Jesus walked on the earth had, through this line, been given authority in the same manner – two with authority saying publicly that this rabbi also met the requirements for having been given authority (or S’mikhah).

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In this encounter with Jesus at the Jordan River, we see that John publicly speaks of the authority of Jesus.

Notes:

Mark 11:29-33

<sup>28</sup> And they said to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?”

<sup>29</sup> But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: <sup>30</sup> The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.”

Jesus is asked by whose authority does He do these things that only a Rabbi with authority has the right to do. His answer is to question them asking where did John get his authority. This is a two-fold answer.

1. It validates that they believed John to have authority.
2. It answers their question with a question (a very Hebraic and rabbinical way of answering). If John had authority, then it is obvious here in this answer that Jesus had gained this authority from John.

John publicly announced the authority of Jesus – in fact He even pointed out that this authority outweighed his own, stating he was not even worthy to undo the sandals of Jesus. A Rabbi with S’mikvah though has to have two with authority declare it over him. Rabbis still to this day will tell you that Jesus is the only Rabbi with S’mikvah who had His authority straight from Almighty God Himself.

Luke 3:21-22

<sup>21</sup> When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.

<sup>22</sup> And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “**You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.**”

Jesus came out of the water, after having been declared over by John, and immediately the heavens opened up and God’s Spirit descended like a dove, and a voice from the heavens declared over Jesus that He had the authority. This echoes another time when God rips the heavens open and declares verbally over Jesus (this time it was on the mountain with His talmidim when Elijah and Moses visited with Him).

Matthew 17:5

<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

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**Notes:**

In both instances God is declaring not only the authority Jesus has been given, but also the mantle of Messiah and that He will one day pay for the sins of the world.

Messiah would fulfill the law and the prophets. Meaning that in each section of the scripture, Messiah would be revealed. We talked before about the three sections – together making up the Tanakh. The name *Tanakh* is a combination of the three portions of text: the Torah (the law), Nevi'im (the prophetic books), and the Ketuvim (the wisdom books). They took the first letters of each word and put them together into the word: *TNK* or *TaNaKh*. The Tanakh consists of the other books that, when combined with the Law of Moses (Torah), make up what we call the Old Testament. Messiah would be revealed in each of these sections. God's words, "This is my son" come straight out of the Ketuvim or wisdom scriptures.

Psalm 2:7

<sup>7</sup> "I will proclaim the decree: *Adonai* said to me, '**You are my son**; today I became your father.

God's next words, "In You I am well pleased" comes straight out of Nevi'im or prophetic scriptures.

Isaiah 42:1

<sup>1</sup> "Here is my servant, whom I support, **my chosen one, in whom I take pleasure**. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the *Goyim*.

And God's last directive, "Listen to him" comes straight out of Torah or the law scriptures.

Deuteronomy 18:15

<sup>15</sup> "*Adonai* will raise up for you a prophet like me from among yourselves, from your own kinsmen. You are to pay attention to him,

God was very clear that this Rabbi was not like all the others. This Rabbi had ALL AUTHORITY – He was the same One who was there at creation. He has now passed that authority on to us, and we are given a directive – we call it the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>18</sup> Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make people from all nations into *talmidim*, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh*, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And

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remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age.”

Notes:

We tend to forget God. In good times we might forget because we are happy and satisfied, forgetting the source of our happiness and satisfaction. In bad times, while we are sometimes driven to God, we may also forget God, especially what he has done for us in the past because our difficulties, be they great or small, overtake us.

It is easily seen why John chose to baptize in the Jordan River at this particular spot. He wanted the people to remember what God had already done, and pointed to what God was still going to do in the future with the coming Messiah.

Josephus (first century Jewish historian) talks of seeing these stones still during his day. They are no longer visible today, but stones have been placed there again as a memorial. It is a very popular area for baptism services to this day.

Why did John go about immersing people?

Luke 3:3

<sup>3</sup> He went all through the Yarden [Jordan] region proclaiming an immersion involving **turning to God from sin in order to be forgiven.**

John’s whole purpose was to draw the hearts of the children to the Father – emphasizing our need for a savior and for forgiveness of sins. In a culture that fears water, it is interesting that God always leads them to water as a representation of being cleansed.

Matthew 3:13

<sup>13</sup> Then Yeshua came from the Galil [Galilee] to the Yarden [Jordan] to be immersed by Yochanan [John].

Knowing what John’s mission was – focusing on the forgiveness of sins – why would Jesus come to be baptized? He was without sin. John even tried to stop him.

Matthew 3:14

<sup>14</sup> But Yochanan [John] tried to stop him. “You are coming to me? I ought to be immersed by you!” <sup>15</sup> However, Yeshua answered him, “Let it be this way now, because we should do everything righteousness requires.” Then Yochanan [John] let him.

If Jesus was without sin, why would he insist that he be baptized by John? The Jordan River isn’t really that wide – we would probably call it more of a creek than a river, especially at certain places.

In the Jewish world water has two diametrically opposed meanings. On the one hand it is this cleansing, life-giving gift of God. On the other hand water is a dangerous, churning, deadly thing in the wadis (canyons) in the desert. Therefore, to the Jews, churning, moving water is a symbol of

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chaos. It's the opposite of God. It's that destructive flood in the desert, lack of order, lack of meaning; everything that's opposite of the organization, the goodness, the purpose of God.  
Look back at how the world began.

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Genesis 1:2

<sup>2</sup> The earth was unformed and void, darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water.

The world began with churning, chaotic water. It was "unformed and void." It was totally meaningless, absolutely without purpose.

Fortunately, as the Spirit of God hovered, God spoke and when He spoke to the water, out of that chaos came order: land, plants, animals, people – all working magnificently together, the exact opposite of chaos.

God turned it over to His two servants, Adam and Eve, and the next thing was temptation. They decided they didn't want to do it God's way, and their sin turned this beautiful order back into chaos. Sin led to chaos, which tore their family apart – their eldest son killing his brother. Within 9 generations the chaos had so descended upon this beautiful world God created that He had to destroy it by flood.

The word used in the scripture for someone whose life is in chaos is: **the poor**. We think, culturally, that "poor" means those without money.

While not having money is a kind of chaos, it isn't necessarily the whole picture. *The poor* in the scripture refers to people whose lives are in chaos. Not all are monetarily devoid. Someone with a lot of money could be called "poor" if their life was in chaos.

Isaiah said that someday the Spirit of God will hover over the chaos, and then what will happen?

Isaiah 35:5-6

<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped; <sup>6</sup> then the lame man will leap like a deer, and the mute person's tongue will sing.

Isaiah 61:1-3

<sup>1</sup> The Spirit of *Adonai Elohim* is upon me, because *Adonai* has anointed me to announce **good news to the poor**. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted; to proclaim freedom to the captives, to let out into light those bound in the dark; <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the favor of Adonai and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, <sup>3</sup> yes, provide for those in Tziyon [Zion] who mourn, giving them garlands instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a cloak of praise instead of a heavy spirit, so that they will be called oaks of righteousness planted by Adonai, in which he takes pride.

This promise was known by all the generations after Isaiah that someday God’s Spirit would hover, and the poor, in whatever form, will be brought out of chaos and back to order. This is what the rabbis taught for centuries.

**Notes:**

It is clear to see here the connection to Jesus’ baptism and possibly the reason for it – or at least one of the reasons for it. (God likes to have multiple layers to most things.) Jesus came down to the river to do mikvah. He didn’t need forgiveness – he was not a sinner. He could have used it to dedicate his “head, heart, hands, and feet” (as they are taught in mikvah), and that’s probably part of it, but it could be that He went down to the river to make a statement. Jesus went down to the river, stepping out into the water, right in the middle of the chaos – this man in whom there was no chaos. He did exactly what the priests had done all those years before when Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. They stepped out into the chaos of the water – at high tide – and their trust in God led to God drying up the river – stopping the chaos – so they could pass through on dry land.

Luke 3:21-22

<sup>21</sup> When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.

<sup>22</sup> And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”

Fortunately, the Spirit of God hovered, the voice spoke, and up out of the water Jesus came – bringing a way of salvation out of the chaos. What happened next? The blind began to see, the lame began to walk, the deaf had their ears opened up, dead were raised. Not everyone who had an ailment was healed – just a few, but out of that chaos a little order was restored. One support of this interpretation of why Jesus had to be baptized is this: *What is then the next even that happens with Jesus?*

Matthew 4:1

<sup>1</sup> Then the Spirit led Yeshua up into the wilderness to be tempted by the Adversary.

The immediate next event in Jesus’ life is the temptation – mirroring the events of the first time God created order out of chaos with Adam and Eve. The next thing was they were tempted. They failed, where Jesus would not. But He had to be baptized to represent his mission: to bring order out of chaos.

Aren’t you glad Jesus didn’t remain on the bank and just tell these people who were in chaos to follow Him? Instead, He stepped down into the chaos with us, even though He had never sinned and had no reason to be baptized.

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John later questioned Jesus about this purpose. He had been arrested and was sitting in Herod's jail. He sent his talmidim to ask of Jesus:

Matthew 11:2-6

<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Yochanan the Immerser, who had been put in prison, heard what the Messiah had been doing; so he sent a message to him through his *talmidim*, <sup>3</sup> asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for someone else?" <sup>4</sup> Yeshua answered, "Go and tell Yochanan what you are hearing and seeing — <sup>5</sup> **the blind are seeing again, the lame are walking**, people with *tzara'at* [leprosy] are being cleansed, **the deaf are hearing**, the dead are being raised, **the Good News is being told to the poor** — <sup>6</sup> and how blessed is anyone not offended by my harsh words!"

Jesus sends them back with an answer of all these miracles that are being performed. He ties together several scriptures that tell of what He, the Messiah, will do. What he leaves out is: "the prisoners will be set free."

John knows this is what He left out – purposely. Jesus sends John's disciples back to tell John that he is going to die in prison. These harsh words would naturally offend some, which explains why Jesus mentions how blessed you are to not be offended by His harsh words. What harsh words? *The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear* – those are not harsh words. The harsh words are that John is not going to be released.

Jesus then turns to the crowd and says:

Matthew 11:11

<sup>11</sup> Yes! I tell you that among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than Yochanan [John] the Immerser! Yet the one who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he!

Based on Jesus' teaching, John got to see that the One who would come to undo the chaos had come! In this, He had the greatest privilege. We get to bring this knowledge to everyone, and that makes us even greater than John, whose life was coming to a close very shortly after this exchange.

Our mission is to walk into this world of chaos and bring just a little bit of new order to broken people. Every time we go out of our way to encounter the "poor" around us, we give people just a taste of the sweetness of the order of God.

We cannot stand on the bank. Our mission starts with stepping into the chaos, just as Jesus did. Our whole purpose as Christians should be to be like Jesus – walk as He walked – walk WHERE He walked! Jesus, who honestly was the one person who could have chosen not to step into that water (because He did not need to be forgiven) chose to step out into the chaos to show us the way we need to live – stepping out into the chaos of our lives and bringing the order and sweetness of God to those who are poor. Notice this scripture:

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Matthew 11:5

**... the Good News is being told to the poor!**

Those who are poor monetarily don't need words spoken to them, they would need action – money. This is why we can determine easily that "poor" does not mean "lacking money." It means those lacking God. Those living in chaos. These are the people who need God's hand in their lives. These are the people we are meant to encounter. It's easy to say we will just give money – money for someone else to take care of the problems (missionaries?). If we are like Jesus, we are down in the chaos with chaotic people.

To be like Jesus is choosing: righteousness, holiness, obedience, passion, etc. It is also a willingness to look for those places where we enter the world of brokenness. This is an area where some Christians do very well, and others of us are lacking. We would much rather send a donation and have someone else get into the trenches with people.

**The reality is that it's OUR JOB to be the person who encounters someone and points them to the God who brings order out of the chaos of their lives.**

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